

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 BANGKO 12032 040847Z

14

ACTION EA-13

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5369

INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMCONSUL UDORN

USSAG NKP THAI

13TH ADVON UDORN

S E C R E T BANGKOK 12032

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : PFOR, PINT, MARR, TH

SUBJECT : U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND

1. RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH THE GOVERNORS OF THE PRINCIPAL BASE TOWNS IN THE NORTHEAST--UDORN, NAKHON PHANOM, UBON, AND KORAT--INDICATE NO PRESSURE ON THEIR PART FOR U.S. TROOP PHASE-DOWNS OR WITHDRAWALS. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY SAY THEY WANT THE AIRMEN TO STAY. TWO STATED THAT SMALL-SCALE REDUCTIONS WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE, BUT THAT COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL WOULD BE OUT OF THE QUESTION. WHILE IN AT LEAST ONE CASE PERSONAL FINANCIAL INTEREST MAY BE AT STAKE, THE PRINCIPAL REASON GIVEN FOR RETAINING AMERICAN FORCES WAS THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN SITUATION AFTER THE SCHEDULED AUGUST 15 BOMBING HALT IN CAMBODIA. THE GOVERNORS ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER HANOI'S INTENTIONS IN THE REGION.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 BANGKO 12032 040847Z

2. THE GOVERNORS NEAR THE CAMBODIAN BORDER WERE UNDERSTANDABLY

DISTURBED ABOUT THE CAMBODIAN SITUATION AND DISTRESSED BY RUMORS ABOUT THE POSSIBLE RETURN OF SIHANOUK WHOM THEY REGARD AS A TROUBLEMAKER FOR THAILAND. THE NAKHON PHANOM GOVERNOR WAS MORE PREOCCUPIED WITH LAOS. HE IS FEARFUL OF A COALITION GOVERNMENT IN VIENTIANE AND THE SUPPORT PATHET LAO CABINET MINISTERS MIGHT PROVIDE THAI INSURGENTS (SIC).

3. ALTHOUGH MINOR FRICTIONS CONSISTENTLY ARISE IN THAI-AMERICAN COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN THE BASE TOWNS, ALL THE GOVERNORS CONTENTED THERE WERE NO SERIOUS PROBLEMS. GIVEN THE PRESENT FLUID SOUTHEAST ASIAN SITUATION, THEY WOULD LIKE TO SEE U.S. FORCES STAY ON. U.S. PRESENCE, THEY SAY, PROVIDES A MORALE BOOST TO THE THAI ARMED FORCES AND THE MAJORITY OF THE THAI PEOPLE.

4. COMMENT: THE GOVERNORS ARE CONSERVATIVE BUREAUCRATS WHO HAVE SPENT MANY YEARS WENDING THEIR WAY UPWARDS IN THE THAI CIVIL SERVICES. THEY HAVE MATURED IN AN ERA OF CLOSE THAI-AMERICAN COOPERATION. WHILE INFLUENTIAL MEMBERS OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SOME STUDENT LEADERS ARE CAMPAIGNING FOR A REEXAMINATION OF THAILAND'S SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES, OUR READINGS INDICATE THAT KEY THAI DECISION MAKERS SHARE THE GOVERNORS' VIEWS THAT NOW IS NOT THE MOMENT FOR ABRUPT OF DRASTIC U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWALS FROM THAILAND. THESE DECISION MAKERS WOULD, HOWEVER, BE IN FAVOR OF STARTING A PROCESS OF GRADUAL AND ORDERLY REDUCTIONS JUST AS SOON AS SECURITY CONDITIONS IN THE AREA PERMIT. THANOM HAS, IN FACT, ANNOUNCED PUBLICLY THAT JOINT US-RTG TALKS ARE UNDER WAY LOOKING TOWARD INITIATION OF THIS PROCESS.
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